

Parshas Noach -5768-
The Eternal Promise

There could not have been greater poetry and serendipitous timing then to have the Nobel committee announce that this years prize for Peace will be going to a U.N. committee and former Senator and Vice President Albert Gore – for their work on bringing awareness to Global Warming - then Erev Shabbos, Parshas Noach.

Parshas Noach, after all, is the story of G-d using weather and grave environmental altercations to bring about astounding change. The parallels do not end there. The 120 years since the industrial revolution, claims Mr. Gore, have been the catalyst for these harsh changes in our generation - and time is running out - and his message like, Lhavdil Ad Lanetzech, Noach's 120 year long passion, is falling as well, according to some, on deaf ears. And, also analogous to Noach's time, as the Zohar teaches, is that that generation had the potential to bring themselves to unseen spiritual heights –thus the punishments from both the waters from the deep (representing Torah Sh'baal Peh) and the waters from above (representing the Torah Sh'bChsav) –, and, in the sixth generation of the sixth millennia (mid-late 19th century) too will be an era of unforeseen wisdom and potential, an uncanny prediction by the Zohar of the beginning of modern man.

However, the similarities must end there. The A-mighty, after the destruction of the flood, made a promise both to Himself אֵל לְבוֹ (8:21) – and to Mankind (9:8) that no whole species of animal will ever go completely extinct and the environment as we know it –summer, spring, winter and fall, cold days and hot months (8:20-22) –will survive the existence of the world.

How strange, that after G-d comes to the realization that the world in general, and Man in particular, failed Him, and, after He decides to completely annihilate them, He starts the world up yet again with no important, or even apparent, change or modification to prevent such ubiquitous sinfulness from ever reoccurring. Stranger still, He then promises that there is no need to fear such future reprisals for He will never destroy us again?!? Is that what one says to stimulate improvement and devotion, "You will not be punished again so harshly"?

Unless, there *was* indeed an alteration. Perhaps, if we could only understand what *caused* such a decline in Human and Animal spiritual growth that preceded the flood we will discover what it *was* that G-d needed to, and did, "improve".

Visualize the temperament of that world before the Flood; belief in G-d was never a challenge - how could it be so close to creation? Adam, who all then had heard of, many even knew him personally, was created only to then be banished from the Garden of Eden that same day, forever changing what humans were supposed to accomplish, attain and even take pleasure in. They, too, must have had a tremendous sense of insecurity for their own future. Would G-d continue to let his "experiment" thrive in this *present* world, this new "Garden"? Would He evict them as well to only then begin anew, or expel them from their status of peace and tranquility?

The works of the Baalei Mussar-Masters of Jewish Thought (the school of Mussar focused on developing fine character through honest analyses and frank discussion of Man's shortcomings) are replete with comments that stress that nothing breeds sin more than the *lack* of Yishuv Hadas-"Peace of Mind". Indeed our Rabbis of the Talmud teach that "There is no joy like the bliss found when doubt and insecurity are removed", obviously, then, the converse would be true; there is no Atzvus-sadness like that found where there *does* exist insecurity.

A lack of security in our respective place, health or well being can cause a severe case of שׂוֹאֵב-forlorn that in turn brings the temptation of throwing in the spiritual towel.

What the world before the Great Flood was *lacking* was a promise by G-d that we will *always* exist and He will never reprogram the world without us – no matter how low we may descend.

That, perhaps, is why immediately after the Flood He promised to never destroy the world. That first generation was right! He did destroy it. But it was because of this knowledge, fear, that they had, that was the catalyst for that destruction. So, when starting fresh He gave us new optimism and security.

If you ask those on the West (Left?) Coast about earthquakes they will no doubt explain that nothing is more frightening. This (bang your foot on the floor), the earth, the ground, is all we have, and if our foundation is not secure than neither are we.

Parents must know this, when/if we fight the grounding of our children shakes, their insecurity becomes profound, and like the generation that preceded the flood they too can not grow emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Rabbi Y. Kamenetzky, when he would visit the home of his grandchildren would be asked by his sons and daughters to sit at the head of the table, “Never should a child see his fathers place at the head of the table change¹.”

Sometimes, at a get-together, we feel it necessary to forward the conversation by challenging family or friends on their beliefs, not thinking that when our mothers told us not to talk about religion and politics, it was for a reason. By challenging the yeshiva boy about his Rosh Yeshiva’s philosophies we are killing him and the bond he so cherishes; by showing anything but love to our spouses in front of our children we are killing their potential; by belittling others and the views they hold so dear, we are not just knocking their opinions but their essence as well.

On the other hand, if we were to cultivate and respect the ground that others walk on, their world, we afford them the Yishuv Hadas-Peace of Mind that we all need to become our best.

Let us remember the lesson of G-d’s promise to Noach, to us, and learn from it as well.

¹ See Reb Yaakov, Artscroll publications.

